

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse affects millions of people from all social, racial, economic, ethnic and religious groups. The abuse is not always physical. Victims also can suffer from mental cruelty. Also, men do not always initiate the abuse. Females or other family members may be abusers, as well.

The Epidemic of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a more widespread problem than you may realize. Consider:

- › Four to 6 million people a year are victims of spousal abuse.
- › Approximately 60 percent of families experience violence in their own homes.
- › Nearly 25 percent of American women will be abused by their partners at some point during their lives.
- › Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women age 15 to 44 and is the second-leading cause of injuries to women of all ages.
- › More than 1,000 women die annually as a result of domestic violence at the hands of their partners.
- › Roughly 95 percent of abusers are male.
- › One out of every five women who go to hospital emergency rooms has been battered.
- › More than 3 million American children each year are at risk of witnessing domestic violence in their homes.
- › An estimated 60 percent of children who witnessed or suffered abuse continue the cycle of abuse as adults.

Warning Signs of Abuse

Part of the problem of domestic abuse is that the victim often does not realize or acknowledge that he or she is being abused. Step back and take a look at the troublesome areas of your life. Recognize the warning signs. You may be a victim of domestic abuse if your partner or family member:

- › Slaps, shoves, bites, hits, punches, kicks, chokes or hurts you with any object
- › Forces you to have sex
- › Threatens to hurt you or your family
- › Intimidates or manipulates you or your children
- › Prevents you from seeing friends or family
- › Continually criticizes, humiliates or verbally abuses you
- › Regularly behaves in a controlling, overprotective or jealous manner
- › Destroys personal property
- › Regularly communicates via angry shouts
- › Denies access to finances or cars
- › Refuses to help you when you are vulnerable.

The danger could be greater if your partner or family member:

- › Uses drugs or alcohol

- › Has access to guns or other weapons
- › Has a previous history as an abuser or abuse victim
- › Threatens, fantasizes or jokes about suicide or homicide
- › Stalks or regularly monitors you.

The Stages of Abuse

There are three phases in a typical abusive relationship:

- › Stage One: The abuse victim usually senses her or his mate's building tension and edginess. The abuser may threaten or belittle her or him with condescending remarks. The victim may internalize the anger and begin experiencing physiological symptoms provoked by stress, such as depression, headaches and anxiety. The abuser may begin to exhibit violent behavior, such as shoving, slapping and grabbing.
- › Stage Two: Tension builds until a violent episode erupts. The victim may or may not defend herself or himself. Usually, the victim hides the physical signs of abuse and refuses to seek help or confide in friends. The abuser may quickly forget the episode and not acknowledge the victim's injuries.
- › Stage Three: Relief sets in that the episode is over. The abuser is usually remorseful over his or her behavior and worries that the victim may leave, perhaps prompting the abuser to apologize and attempt to smooth things over with affection and gifts. The abuser may say he or she cannot live without the victim, causing the victim to feel responsible for provoking the abuse and for the abuser's wellbeing.

What You Can Do

You can put an end to the abuse and prevent you and your family from being victimized. Start by accepting the reality that you are in an abusive relationship and that domestic violence is a crime. Unless you do something about it, the abuse may continue to escalate.

You may begin to accept the abuse and deny that there is a problem. Meanwhile, the health and safety of you and your family may remain at risk, and the cycle of violence continues.

It takes courage to seek help and leave the abusive relationship. You may be fearful that the abusive partner will inflict further harm on you or your family if you report the behavior. You may be worried about starting a new life on your own, without the resources of your partner. You may be concerned that your relatives, in-laws and friends will not support your decision or may take pity on the abuser. Put these feelings aside and make the safety and dignity of you and your family the top priority.

- › Break the cycle of domestic abuse by following these suggestions. If you are in immediate danger or have recently been abused:
- › Remove yourself and family members from a dangerous environment immediately. Go to a safe location.
- › Call 911. Ask about your legal and safety options. You may be referred to a local shelter. Ask the police and the court system for legal protection. By pressing charges, you may have the batterer arrested. Obtain an order of protection by contacting your local law-enforcement agency.
- › Get medical attention. You may be injured much more seriously than you realize. Also, for evidence, bruises and injuries should be photographed and documented as soon as possible.

If you are not in immediate danger:

- › Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE.
- › Develop a safety plan to flee from a future domestic violence situation. Have an emergency bag ready and packed with extra clothes, money and checks, as well as important health, financial and identification records. Map out an escape route and emergency destination.

If you have a new health insurance plan or insurance policy beginning on or after Sept. 23, 2010, domestic and interpersonal violence screenings and counseling for all women must be covered under the Affordable Care Act,

without your having to pay a co-payment or co-insurance or meet your deductible. This applies only when these services are delivered by a network provider, and some other restrictions may apply.

Your Rights and Responsibilities

- › You do not deserve to be abused, intimidated or controlled.
- › You have the right to be safe.
- › You have the right to make your own choices.
- › You have the right to receive respect, help and support.
- › You have the right to press criminal and civil charges and receive protection.
- › You have the right to leave the abuser.
- › You have the responsibility to protect your children and other dependents who are at risk for abuse.
- › You are not responsible for making the abuser change. The abuser must accept full responsibility for his or her abusive behavior and seek professional help to learn effective ways to control these behaviors.

Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline: www.thehotline.org

Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men & Women: <http://dahmw.org>

Feminist Majority Foundation: <http://feminist.org>

WomensHealth.gov: www.womenshealth.gov

HealthCare.gov: www.healthcare.gov

Additional Information

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